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Week of
December 2, 1940

Critics'

THEATRE REVIEWS

INDEX

Stage Play	Pages
Another Sun	382, 383, 384
At the Stroke of Eight	305, 306
Beverly Hills	226, 227, 228
Billy Draws a Horse	436, 437, 438
*Blind Alley	252, 253, 254
Boyd's Daughter	256, 257, 258
*Boys and Girls Together	266, 267, 268
Burning Deck (The)	376, 377, 378
*Cabin in the Sky	242, 243, 244
Case of Youth (A)	357, 358
*Charley's Aunt	249, 250, 251
Christmas Eve	427, 428, 429
†*Corn Is Green (The)	209, 210, 211
Du Barry Was a Lady	439, 440, 441
Earl Carroll's Vanities	418, 419, 420
Farm of Three Echoes	448, 449, 450
Fifth Column (The)	370, 371, 372
†*Fledgling	206, 207, 208
Geneva	403, 404, 405
*George Washington Slept Here	246, 247, 248
Glamour Preferred	220, 221, 222
Gondoliers (The)	269, 270, 271
Goodbye in the Night	364, 365, 366
Grey Farm	317, 318
Hamlet	442, 443, 444
Heavenly Express	325, 326, 327
*Hellzapoppin	493, 494, 495
Higher and Higher	337, 338, 339
*Hold On to Your Hats	278, 279, 280
†*Horse Fever	212, 213
International Incident (An)	340, 341, 342
*It Happens on Ice	259, 260, 261
John Henry	421, 422, 423
*Johnny Belinda	274, 275, 276
Journey to Jerusalem	262, 263, 264
Juno and the Paycock	415, 416, 417
Jupiter Laughs	281, 282, 283
Keep off the Grass	302, 303, 304
Key Largo	451, 452, 453
Kind Lady	286, 287, 288
Kindred	430, 431, 432
King Richard II	343, 344, 345
Ladies and Gentlemen	469, 470, 471
Ladies in Retirement	351, 352, 353
Lady in Waiting	348, 349, 350
Leave Her to Heaven	379, 380, 381
*Life With Father	457, 458, 459
Liliom	354, 355, 356
Little Foxes (The)	490, 491, 492

Stage Play	Pages
*Louisiana Purchase	296, 297, 298
Love for Love	293, 294, 295
Love's Old Sweet Song	319, 320, 321
Male Animal (The)	424, 425, 426
*Man Who Came to Dinner (The)	472, 473, 474
Man Who Killed Lincoln (The)	412, 413, 414
Margin for Error	460, 461, 462
Medicine Show	331, 332, 333
Morning Star	328, 329, 330
Morning's at Seven	445, 446, 447
My Dear Children	400, 401, 402
Night Music	385, 386, 387
Out From Under	315, 316
*Panama Hattie	233, 234, 235
Passenger to Bali (A)	367, 368, 369
Philadelphia Story (The)	487, 488, 489
Pins and Needles	496, 497
Quiet Please	224, 225, 226
Return Engagement	230, 231, 232
Return of the Vagabond (The)	307, 308, 309
Reunion in New York	388, 389, 390
Romeo and Juliet	310, 311, 312
Russian Bank	299, 300, 301
See My Lawyer	478, 479, 480
*Separate Rooms	359, 360
Scene of the Crime (The)	346, 347
Sim Sala Bim	283, 284
Skylark	475, 476, 477
Strangler Fig (The)	313, 314
Streets of Paris (The)	484, 485, 486
Suspect	334, 335, 336
Suzanna and the Elders	236, 237, 238
Taming of the Shrew (The)	397, 398, 399
Theatre of the Piccoli	361, 362, 363
There Shall Be No Night	322, 323, 324
Time of Your Life (The)	463, 464, 465
'Tis of Thee	240, 241
*Tobacco Road	498, 499, 500
Too Many Girls	466, 467, 468
*Twelfth Night	216, 217, 218
Two for the Show	394, 395, 396
Two on an Island	409, 410, 411
Unconquered (The)	391, 392, 393
Walk With Music	290, 291, 292
Weak Link (The)	373, 374, 375
When We Are Married	433, 434, 435
World We Make (The)	454, 455, 456
Yokel Boy	481, 482, 483
Young Couple Wanted	406, 407, 408

* *Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play during the week of December 2, 1940.*
† *"Horse Fever" opened last Saturday, November 23rd, at the Mansfield Theatre.*
† *"The Corn Is Green" opened last Tuesday, November 26th, at the National Theatre.*
† *"Fledgling" opened last Wednesday, November 27th, at the Hudson Theatre.*

THEATRE REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

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New York Post	**New York Daily News**
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"Fledgling"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *November 28, 1940*

"Fledgling" Seeks to Point Out Tragedy Of the Disbeliever

"Fledgling," drama by Eleanor Carroll Chilton and Philip Lewis. Produced by Otis Chatfield-Taylor at the Hudson Theatre, New York, Nov. 27, 1940.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

THERE have been tortured minds involved in the preparation of "Fledgling" for the stage, including those of the authors, Eleanor Carroll Chilton and Philip Lewis. Nor can contact with them leave the audience entirely at peace.

The question here, as it was revealed at the Hudson Theatre last night, is the responsibility of the heretic parent who elects to bring up his children stanch in his own liberal agnosticism.

It is a question that is intelligently debated, however variously the debate may be accepted, and therefore it breeds respect for its creators. But it is a question that is also confused and weakened by the doubts and fears of these same creators and their seemingly deliberate manufacture of theatrical situations.

Hugh Linton is a successful writer of liberal novels and a crusader for religious freedom. He scoffs at all orthodox beliefs, convinces the girl he marries of the world's need of "a light in dark places," and brings up the son and daughter born to them to stand defiantly and a little arrogantly on these convictions.

When Doubts Creep In

When we meet them in the play the children are grown and restless, and the wife, stricken with a creeping paralysis, is turning back to the church. Only the husband and father stands entirely firm.

At this point the authors also cheat a bit, it seems to me, by making their liberal representative a violator of the social code. He loves his wife, but he takes a mistress as a stimulation for his creative work.

The increasing misery of her mother so preys upon the mind of the fledgling daughter that she finally is impelled to a mercy killing. This act she tries to justify through her disbelief in religion and the retribution of a punishing God. When she fails to gain strength and understanding from the father who has let her down she kills herself.

Hard Going

The authors work themselves into a fairly untenable position. Their effort is to remain honest in their debate, with no more than an implied and obvious sympathy toward the church. But they are forced to compromise.

They alienate sympathy for the heretic by making him something less than a pillar against which his offspring can reasonably lean. They aggravate the issue by deliberately denying the confused daughter a convincing reason for keeping her away from her mother.

And their effort at comedy relief is particularly unhappy in the case of a bounder who insults both the Linton family's hospitality and the intelligence of the audience.

It should be said for them that their tragic story is for the most part holding, and that it was received with every indication of sustained interest by last night's audience.

Good Performances

And it should be said for the cast that there are several splendid individual performances —that of Sylvia Weld as the tortured daughter in particular. This young actress, who played the part in a New Hampshire Summer theatre last August, is earnest and understanding, emotionally reticent and sincerely convincing.

Ralph Morgan, back after nine years of picture work on the Coast, is still the suave and gentle and substantial actor he was when he went away.

Tom Powers is finely representative of the church, Norma Chambers does her best for the somewhat stilted character of the mother, and Frederick Bradlee is an honest son.

In the bits John Hoysradt is probably as unhappy as he should be as the bounder and Margaret Clifford is helpful as a priesy nurse. The setting is a nice interior by Richard Whorf and the direction, on the literal side, is by Heinrich Schnitzler.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, *November 28, 1940*

Ralph Morgan Returns From Hollywood to Appear in a Dramatization of 'Follow the Furies'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

SOME remarkably unpleasant characters drive themselves passionately into some remarkably unpleasant situations in "Fledgling," which was put on at the Hudson last evening. Although that statement does not illustrate the higher criticism, it explains why this theatregoer is not wildly enthusiastic about the play. Eleanor Carroll Chilton and Philip Lewis have written it out of Miss Chilton's novel, "Follow the Furies," and Ralph Morgan, an old friend of Broadway, has come all the way from Hollywood to act the part of the papa.

Sylvia Weld, heretofore an actress of microscopic roles, is now promoted to the rank of female heavy, and acquits herself with conspicuous credit. But "Fledgling" is a singularly tortuous play that involves a mercy killing and quite a lot of reason and religion. It comes as a complete surprise to one who thought that people had given up not believing in God.

• • •

The authors are terribly in earnest about something that is certainly not funny. They are illustrating—they are even framing—the tragedy of an attractive little girl who has been brought up to live by reason and to regard religion as barbaric superstition. Acting entirely upon reason, she secretly poisons her mother to save her from the horror and humiliation of a long period of hopeless invalidism. Her motives are loving and merciful. But she finds that reason cannot exorcise the sense of guilt that consumes her.

Although that is an intelligent theme, infinitely superior to the topics that the theatre has been latterly discussing, a theatregoer must be able to believe in the characters of a drama as a first step toward developing an interest in the theme. The characters of "Fledgling" are like pieces of cardboard shuffled around in narrative. A prating father who has devoted his life to reason, a mawkish mother, a surly son, an intellectual daughter, a miserable mistress, an unbearable wit, a baby-talk nurse and a servile gardener associate with each other at arm's length on the stage because the authors keep bringing them together. But for all the enjoyment they take in each other's company they might as well fly screaming into the woods. No matter how exalted the topic they are supposed to illustrate, this theatregoer asks to be excused from taking such characters seriously.

• • •

As the director, "Fledgling" presents Heinrich Schnitzler, son of Arthur Schnitzler, and now offering his first New York performance. Well, it is not very good. It is cold and academic. The members of the family behave as though they had never seen each other before; the actors seem to have no relation to each other. Every performance is isolated from all the rest. Mr. Morgan is patient and kindly as the father. Miss Weld plays the central part of the daughter with a burning intensity that one whole-heartedly respects. As the venomous wit and egoist John Hoysradt is frightening. Tom Powers acts a priest with all proper respect and Lora Baxter plays a mistress with becoming unhappiness.

Richard Whorf, serving as the scene designer, has more luck than any of the actors. Nothing is expected of him except an attractive setting, and he has supplied it without a murmur, quarrel or argument. While the actors snarl at each other it is pleasant to gaze at the fine paneling on his walls.

"Fledgling"

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, *November 28, 1940*

Mercy Killing

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

IT IS PROBABLY most ungracious for those who have been pleading for some serious plays to be captious about "Fledgling." For, whatever else you may say about it, "Fledgling" certainly is a serious play. An earnest problem drama of the more intense vintage, the new work by Eleanor Carroll Chilton and Philip Lewis is gravely concerned with such things as a mercy killing, the influence of parents upon children and the entire matter of religion versus atheism. It is decidedly on the side of the angels in its debates, and the Catholic Church is editorially victorious over the representatives of godlessness, but the entire combat is so wordy, cloudy, confused and one-sided that the triumph is entirely a hollow one. The new play has to its credit a fine and moving performance by Miss Sylvia Weld, but its drama seems to me misty and turgid.

• • •

In a thesis play it is a good idea for the authors to give at least the impression of allowing both sides a show. No matter how violently they may feel on one side or the other, no matter how determined in advance they are to let one particular viewpoint win, they should at least pretend that they are giving their enemies a chance to speak out. Miss Chilton and Mr. Lewis, however, make the great mistake of stacking the cards too obviously against atheism. Their atheist, played rather tentatively by Ralph Mogan, is so clearly a fake, a hypocrite and a general all-around scoundrel and his arguments are so obviously specious that his side of the case never has a chance. It is my impression that the authors might have combated godlessness far more effectively if they had allowed its representative to talk with some eloquence and behave with just a shred of decency, and had still shown him to be wrong.

• • •

The daughter, who really is the central figure of the play, is much more believably drawn. As the authors and Miss Weld show her, however, she seems far too intelligent and forthright a girl to have been taken in by her fraudulent father. Instead of adopting his viewpoint as her own, I think she would have struck out immediately for just the opposing idea, whether it had been Christianity or atheism. Nevertheless, it seems that she was influenced by her father, and so, when she discovered that her mother, who was a hopeless victim of paralysis, was in danger of being deserted by her husband, she proceeded to give her poison. Then, in the last act, when she finds that her godless father is not only about to marry his mistress but apparently is not so sure about mercy killings and the hereafter as he had pretended to be, she kills herself. In outline it is perhaps a powerful enough story, but it is clumsy in the telling and is never resolved in its ideas. It has some very bad incidental comedy, too.

• • •

Thanks to the moving and honest acting of Miss Weld as the soul-tortured daughter, "Fledgling" often takes on moments of effective emotional drama. Miss Weld is clearly one of the finest of our younger actresses, and she gives her most admirable and mature performance in her current role. There is a good performance, too, by Miss Norma Chambers as the stricken wife and by Tom Powers as an urbane and understanding Jesuit. In smaller roles, Walter Coy as the Catholic juvenile and Miss Lora Baxter as the father's publisher and mistress are helpful enough. But the part of the atheistic father, "the hypocritical author whose motto is "light in dark places," is such a hollow and fatuous one that Mr. Morgan, who comes back to us after nine years in Hollywood, finds it far too much for him. So does John Hoysradt, who unwisely left the cast of "The Man Who Came to Dinner," to play the most annoying comedy role in the recent drama. "Fledging" is a sincere and earnest play gone sadly awry.

'FLEDGLING'

A play in three acts by Eleanor Carroll Chilton and Philip Lewis; based on a novel by Miss Chilton called "Follow the Furies"; directed by Heinrich Schnitzler; setting by Richard Whorf; presented at the Hudson Theater on November 27, 1940, by Otis Chatfield-Taylor. The cast:

Grace Linton	Norma Chambers
Andrew Linton	Frederick Bradlee
Barbara Linton	Sylvia Weld
Hugh Linton	Ralph Morgan
John Forbes	Walter Coy
Stella Berrick	Lora Baxter
Kenneth Brede	John Hoysradt
Bartholomew	Harry Hanlon
Miss Harper	Margaret Clifford
Richard Dennis	Tom Powers

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, *November 28, 1940*

"Fledgling" a Play of Interest at the Hudson

By JOHN MASON BROWN

FROM her novel, "Follow the Furies," Eleanor Carroll Chilton has culled, with the aid of Philip Lewis, a play called "Fledgling" which not only holds the attention but in general merits it. It is a courageous play, adult in its dilemmas and in much of its thinking. In this war year, so undistinguished in its dramatic output, when most managers have surrendered to the fallacy that comedy, good or bad, but comedy alone would be acceptable, it goes proudly on its way, daring to raise issues not ordinarily raised in the theatre; daring, also, to affront the prejudices of playgoers while wounding their sympathies.

Throughout the evening it benefits by what is literate in its writing, by its refusal to compromise, by the steadfastness with which it faces its catastrophes, and endeavors to grapple with its serious thesis. It may be a problem play which technically has failed to solve many of its own problems. It may be terribly slow in starting. In spite of the somewhat old-fashioned, post-Ibsen, pre-Saroyan zeal with which it seeks to tie its knots, it may leave several disconcerting strings dangling.

It may suffer from the inclusion of such a totally extraneous character as the unpleasant writer whose presence is explained neither by John Hoysradt's acting nor the script. The last act suicide of the daughter who has poisoned her mother to save her from the ravages of the paralysis of which she is a victim may come as an ending not wholly satisfactory. And some of the "big scenes" leading up to this "mercy killing" and this final suicide may be as suspiciously over-contrived as is the one in which the hiding-place chosen by the daughter for the fountain pen she has used as the fatal dropper comes near to being discovered.

But the point—the exciting point—is that, regardless of reservations, one listens to "Fledgling," grateful for what is compassionate, though not distinguished in its writing, and respectful of the bravery shown throughout. For here is a drama, intelligently, sometimes tautly written, which can claim among its virtues the fact that it treats playgoers as grown-ups and the theatre as an adult institution.

Miss Weld Excellent

What Miss Chilton and Mr. Lewis have done, in an unmincing spirit, even if their terms are often no more than "Pinerotic" claptrap, is to show the chasm which divides believers from non-believers and the conflict of a non-believer who is cruelly tested by a need for faith. They do this by dramatizing the dilemmas faced by the atheistic daughter of a famous novelist and free thinker whose wife has returned to the consolations of the Church. Taught to believe by her father that she must be God to herself, this young girl murders her mother, whom she adores, in order to spare her the pain and humiliations of a hopeless illness.

Thereafter, when she learns her father has long been unfaithful to her mother, and discovers she has shocked him by following his teachings, the daughter poisons herself with drops of the same deadly poison with which she stopped her mother's heart. Before taking the fatal drink, she toasts her mother and God—"if there be a God," thus showing how events have shattered the certainties of her atheism.

What adds to the interest of "Fledgling" is the persuasion of much of its playing. If there were no other reason for seeing it, Sylvia Weld's acting of the daughter would provide one. One? A score of reasons, and all of them good. Miss Weld is a young actress of exceptional endowments. She has an interesting face, intelligence, and authority. To talk of promise in the presence of a performance so fully realized is arrant nonsense. She gives hope to those who have been worrying about the reforestation in talents upon which our future theatre is bound to depend.

Ralph Morgan, though at times much too featherweight in quality to suggest the intellectual stature of the novelist he plays, captures his charm and amiability, and grows as the evening progresses. Norma Chambers suggests without any sentimentality or self-pity the full radiance and graciousness of the stricken wife. Frederick Bradlee possesses a nice, light touch as her bafflingly written son. In spite of the self-consciousness of his gestures and movements, Tom Powers admirably projects the patience and affability of the uncle who is a Jesuit priest. Walter Coy is excellent in a quiet-voiced manner as the daughter's Catholic suitor. And vocally at least Margaret Clifford does justice to the humors of a syruppy trained nurse.

If the acting in "Fledgling" is as a whole persuasive, so is the production Otis Chatfield-Taylor has given it. Richard Whorf has set it nicely. And Heinrich Schnitzler has directed it so that the attention does not wander even during those moments in the evening when the writing slows down or stoops to devices suspect of being bogus.

"Fledgling"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *November 28, 1940*

Ralph Morgan Returns to Broadway in Fledgling

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

FLEDGLING, a drama which might have been less poetically but more accurately titled The Last Days of a Paralytic, is to my gloomy mind the most disagreeable play to reach Broadway this season. It is not only disagreeable, which might be forgiven if it were able to jolt the playgoer with some astounding truth, but it is dull as well, and, therefore, inexcusable from the standpoint either of entertainment or art.

The play is an adaptation from a novel called Follow the Furies, and was written by Philip Lewis and Eleanor Carroll Chilton, author of the original story. It was directed by Heinrich Schnitzler, another Viennese artist who has come over to teach Americans how to act like Americans. The result is a hodgepodge of maudlin metaphysics which must be as painful to the actors—some of them good ones—as it is to an audience.

* * *

Fledgling's action begins, after frittering away sufficient time to permit late-comers from 21 to be seated, with the exposition of these facts: Hugh Linton is an author and an atheist, wedded to a Roman Catholic who has temporarily abandoned her faith. He is a free-thinker, a free lover, a moral anarchist, and he has tried to rear his children in conformity with his beliefs. There is considerable explanation that his wife's branch of the family count several Jesuits in their number, and that relations between the two clans have been strained ever since his marriage.

From this point the play staggers and wanders through a mad maze of incidents which include Mrs. Linton's seizure with a paralytic stroke, her gradual passing into a state of imbecility at the very moment her husband is pursuing a fleeing mistress, her deliberate murder by her daughter who pours four drops of nicotine into the medicine (with the very best intentions, of course), several visits by the Jesuits and many resultant discussions about God, the return of Mr. Linton to the house with his recaptured mistress, the recanting of her father's teachings by the daughter and finally the suicide (by 20 drops of nicotine in a glass of rye) of the little rascal who killed her mamma.

* * *

To add to the unpleasantness, the authors have totaled up all the disagreeable qualities of all the characters in The Man Who Came to Dinner and to have combined them in one distressing figure, whom they represent to be a sophisticated author, the kind who writes, they imagine, for the New Yorker. Any other unattractive qualities found lying around they poured into the character of Mr. Linton's adolescent son.

It would be obviously impossible for actors, however competent, to make much sense out of the foggy situations and uninspiring dialogue, and Mr. Schnitzler's direction hasn't helped them to understand what they are trying to do.

Ralph Morgan, returning from Hollywood, displays some acting that is still redolent of the cinema lots. Tom Powers plays the part of a priest with excellent appreciation. Sylvia Weld will find her pretty style ruined if she has many more experiences like this in tragic roles so unsuited to her personality. And I am sorry to see John Hoysradt in such uncongenial surroundings.

Fledgling, fly away from my door!

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, *November 28, 1940*

'Fledgling,' a Problem Play, Opens at the Hudson Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

IT WOULD be difficult to find authors more serious than those who contrived "Fledgling," which opened last evening at the Hudson Theater. There is not a moment of the drama which is not serious; somberly the action leads from "mercy killing" down to suicide, with edifying discussion filling all the pauses. What Eleanor Carroll Chilton and Philip Lewis have devised out of a novel by Miss Chilton is a problem play, and no two ways about it.

The authors show us first the reasonably happy family of a writer who has published twenty novels with titles like "Redemption from Virtue." He is an atheist of the 1890's, with overtones of materialistic rationalism and some trace of the village rebel of about 1915. He has reared his son and daughter to set their faces sternly against religion and to be masters of their own destinies. He has apparently converted his wife, once a Catholic, to his own spare philosophy.

In subsequent scenes the authors show us, rapidly but not rapidly enough, the collapse of the mother under a dread, incurable and anonymous disease which brings progressive paralysis. The writer, who among his other faults is a monster of the first water, leaves his wife's bedside to go to his mistress. The daughter, distracted by love and pity, puts nicotine in her mother's medicine. In the last act, after much further discussion of the state of her soul, the daughter kills herself.

A good many things are wrong with "Fledgling," in addition to its ponderous old-fashionedness. Few of the characters, in spite of reasonably good acting, are at all credible. The discussions are hackneyed, protracted and the cards are flagrantly stacked. The authors do not approve of euthanasia and they are stern against atheism. These things are evil, and they do not believe in giving evil an even break. They do not give the drama much of a break, either.

Sylvia Weld plays the part of the daughter sensitively and with honest emotion and Ralph Morgan is as lifelike in the role of the writer as anybody can be in so improbable a part. It seemed to me that Norma Chambers, Walter Coy and, particularly, Tom Powers were also doing everything that could be expected of them. The play continued to creak.

Critics'

Theatre Reviews

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Critics'

Theatre Reviews

"The Corn Is Green"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, *November 27, 1940*

'The Corn Is Green,' With Ethel Barrymore, Opens at the National Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

LAST evening brought a play worth talking about. Emlyn Williams's "The Corn Is Green," which opened at the National with Miss Ethel Barrymore as its star, is emotionally mature and moving. It tells simply, with dignity and compassion, a story worth telling. It gives the audience something to think and feel about and the actors something to act about. The season, overnight, has come of age.

The story Mr. Williams tells is uncomplicated—probably it is not quite complicated enough. It is the story of a middle-aged spinster who went to a remote Welsh village in the latter part of the last century with a foolish, gallant dream of teaching boys and girls, and their fathers and mothers, to read and write. She found ignorance as black as the mine galleries in which the boys worked from the age of 12, and prejudice and stupidity. And not much of what she did had any lasting value.

But she found one boy whose mind was original and alive and she fought against his ignorance, and his homesickness for the old, easy ways and she got him into Oxford on a scholarship. As Mr. Williams writes the story, that seems a great thing. He makes you believe, while he tells the story, in human dignity and in the importance of the individual and any words which foster that belief are nowadays of peculiar value. Whatever faults "The Corn Is Green" has are of minor importance by comparison.

The play suffers chiefly, especially in the second act, from lack of conflict. Exciting as a whole, the drama is not always exciting in detail, and that is one of the kinds of excitement the theater needs. All that interrupts the salvation of Morgan Evans is a casual affair with a servant's daughter, and the teacher handles that briskly, if not without personal inconvenience. She has to adopt the baby to get Morgan free from this entanglement. This represents dramatic struggle at close to the irreducible minimum; possibly a little below it. But sharply drawn, varied minor characters act as condiments to the solid main dish, and fine acting spices it further.

Miss Barrymore herself is, to put a word to it, magnificent. The human emotions of the part flow through her and are augmented. At the end when, as the teacher, she finally frees the boy and sends him out into the world her playing has amazing depth and is as amazingly moving. As the boy, Richard Waring plays throughout with great perception and vitality.

Miss Thelma Schnee, who has been more or less hidden to date—no doubt under a bushel—is impertinent and funny and uncommonly vivid as the errant Bessie, who momentarily distracts Morgan from his proper path. Edmond Breon plays the part of an expansive, foolish squire with just the correct bustling affability and Rhys Williams is admirable as an upright Welshman. Mildred Dunnock plays a fluttery spinster delightfully and to hear Rosalind Ivan, as Bessie's mother, announce that she couldn't quite take to her daughter is an experience not to be missed. I shouldn't miss any part of "The Corn Is Green" if I were you. It is drama for grownups.

'THE CORN IS GREEN'

A play in three acts by Emlyn Williams; directed by Herman Shumlin; setting by Howard Bay; costumes by Ernest Schrapps; presented by Mr. Shumlin at the National Theater on November 26, 1940. The cast:

John Goronwy Jones	Rhys Williams
Miss Ronberry	Mildred Dunnock
Idwal Morris	Charles S. Pussell
Sarah Pugh	Gwyneth Hughes
A Groom	George Bleasdale
The Squire	Edmond Breon
Mrs. Watty	Rosalind Ivan
Bessie Watty	Thelma Schnee
Miss Moffat	Ethel Barrymore
Robbart Robbatch	Thomas Lyons
Morgan Evans	Richard Waring
Glyn Thomas	Kenneth Clarke
John Owen	Merritt O'Duel
Will Hughes	Terence Morgan
Old Tom	Sayre Crawley

Boys, Girls and Parents: Julia Knox, Amelia Romano, Betty Conibear, Rosalind Carter, Harda Normann, Joseph McInerney, Marcel Dill, Gwilym Williams, Tommy Dix.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, *November 27, 1940*

Miss Barrymore Triumphs in "The Corn Is Green"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

FOR all I know last night's audience at the National may still be cheering. Certainly the bravos which filled the air after the fall of the final curtain were deafening and prolonged. Moreover, there was every good reason for them. Because in Emlyn Williams' "The Corn Is Green" Ethel Barrymore, the true and constant embodiment of the traditions of a great stage family, gives the finest, most thoughtful, and most concentrated performance she has given in many years.

Mr. Williams' play, in which he and Dame Sybil Thorndike scored a genuine success in London, is an agreeable affair. Its story of an English school teacher who invades the mining district of Wales to win a scholarship at Oxford for her brightest pupil, and ends up by adopting his illegitimate child, is as pleasantly told as it is slight.

Considered as a sociological tract, it may be as weighty as a novel written by William J. Locke or Frances Hodgson Burnett. But in spite of its slightness—in spite, too, of its being overlong—its mixture of sugar and coal dust, of schoolroom and slum, of the higher learning and Pollyanna, proves to be almost steadfastly ingratiating.

A final indication of its skill both in establishing character and in advancing a slim story with suspense, is that playgoers are forced to await the news of its hero's winning or losing his Oxford scholarship with as much interest as if they themselves were concerned.

It is Miss Baryymore as the school marm, and a stageful of ably drawn and ably acted secondary village characters, who manage to turn the vegetable marrow of such a plot into good old roast beef. Miss Barrymore brings all her familiar magic—and a new intensity—to her playing of the zealous Miss Moffat.

Entering with a bicycle in hand, and wearing a straw hat, a shirt waist and skirt, she looks like a Gibson girl in a world that has grown up and had its conscience awakened—at least in some countries. Her face is warm with a radiance uniquely her own. Her classic features retain their distinguished beauty. And her voice throbs with those melodies her throat alone has always been able to release. But where in the past Miss Barrymore has often been content to be Miss Barrymore and nothing more (as if that were not impressive enough of itself, regardless of the wigs and make-ups she has been asked to put on), in "The Corn Is Green" she shows freshly-found capacities as an actress. She listens vigilantly. Her mind is always upon what is happening. She turns school marm as gladly as Bliss Perry teaches. All her latent nobility is mobilized, protected by the sheer sunshine of her humor, and given full advantage of her thinking and her charm.

Nor is Miss Barrymore alone in making the production a rewarding one. Mr. Shumlin's direction is at all times considerate of the virtues of the text. Richard Waring, in Mr. Williams' part of the young miner who qualifies for Oxford, gives a performance eloquent in its reticence. Edmond Breon excellently suggests the mingled stupidity, goodness, and arrogance of the local Squire. Thelma Schnee is almost unbearably real as the slut who threatens to stand in the way of the young miner's progress. Rosalind Ivan, as the slut's reformed mother, proves herself a capable character actress. And Rhys Williams acquits himself with unusual credit as a Welshman turned teacher in Miss Barrymore's improvised classrooms.

All in all the evening is a highly satisfactory one. It achieves its desired effects without diabetic sweetness and with much humor. Its characters are pungently observed. And its slight, though pleasant story, takes on the full interest and persuasion which a commendable production and Miss Barrymore at her glowing best are able to give to it.

"The Corn Is Green"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, *November 27, 1940*

Ethel Barrymore in the American Version of Emlyn Williams's 'The Corn Is Green'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

WITH the first real snow of late Autumn comes the first real play of the season. It is "The Corn Is Green," and it was superlatively well played at the National last evening with Ethel Barrymore at the peak of her talents. A play of Welsh life, it is the work of Emlyn Williams, the young British actor who appeared here four years ago in "Night Must Fall," a macabre thriller of which he was also author. Almost a year before the war broke out Mr. Williams played in the original performance of "The Corn Is Green," vastly to every one's satisfaction; and since the play means a good deal to him personally, he had hoped to act it here and supervise the performance.

As things have turned out, he need have few regrets. For Herman Shumlin has staged it with complete respect for the beauty and exaltation of a remarkable drama. There are many things for which to be devoutly thankful this morning. Not the least of them is the fact that theatre has been restored to its high estate.

* * *

Mr. Williams's theme goes straight to the heart of a glorious topic. "The Corn Is Green" shows how light can be brought into minds of rude and ignorant people. Since the story is to some extent a story of Mr. Williams's personal experience, he goes about telling it with simplicity and affection. Into a small village on a remote Welsh countryside comes a restless female with a little money of her own and a mission. She wants to educate the boys who normally go into the mines when they are 12 years old.

One of the boys turns out to have extraordinary talents as a writer. When she reads his first composition she is astonished by the imagination it discloses. She is also exhilarated, for the chance of pushing an ignorant lad over the wall into a civilized life that he can help to enrich is more than she had dared to hope for. And "The Corn Is Green" is the story of how, by faith, resolution and generosity, she passes the flame of enlightenment on to a hand that will carry it further.

* * *

Since this is, at least in part, a true story that probably represents a debt Mr. Williams can never pay, he tells it with extraordinary humanity. His characters are glowing members of the human race—some of them comic, one of them supercilious, one of them slatternly, another dour but aspiring. Representing all kinds of pride, vanity, rebellion, coarseness, stubbornness and goodwill, they make an uncommonly attractive lot, and Mr. Williams keeps them moving in and out of his drama with intimate understanding. But his great character is modestly heroic — the teacher, Miss Moffat, the woman with a light in her mind. Aggressive and truculent in the opening scenes, she grows in grace and perception as the drama moves. What is pride and assurance in the first act becomes a complete surrender in the end to a cause that has overwhelmed her and become much greater than she was when she began.

* * *

As things go in the theatre, this is a great part, and as things are going in the theatre just now, Miss Barrymore plays it magnificently. After a long round of mediocre parts, she knows that something of rare quality has come her way and she has risen nobly to the occasion. She plays it forcefully, but she also plays it with deep compassion, and from now on she can wear Miss Moffat as a jewel in her crown.

As a director, Mr. Shumlin is a painstaking workman. He has cast the drama with great insight and directed it with superb skill. All the actors appear at their best, if not a little better. Richard Waring has never played so well; as the central boy in the story, he brings the character into shape with sharp definition. Thelma Schnee gives a resourceful, rounded performance as the trollop. Rosalind Ivan is vigorously amusing as a housekeeper with religious notions. Mildred Dunnock is excellent as a timid spinster. As a Welsh clerk of studious inclinations, Rhys Williams adds one more to a lengthening list of admirable characterizations, and Edmond Breon catches all the pompousness and geniality of the squire.

All the action occurs within a savory old living-room that Howard Bay has designed with homely appreciation. Everything about "The Corn Is Green" reawakens enthusiasm for the theatre. For Mr. Williams has written a play of devotion and wisdom, and the people who have put it on the stage share his respect for the human truth it represents.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, *November 27, 1940*

Teacher and Pupil

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

MISS BARRYMORE has finally got herself a play of quality, and the results are what we had all anticipated. "The Corn Is Green," which is too good a drama to be described as a "vehicle," is the season's first new serious work of any stature, an earnest and dramatic study of a budding young Welsh genius and his understanding teacher, given solidity, force and remarkable interest by the humor and the keen insight into character that have gone into the writing. The work of the excellent English actor named Emlyn Williams, the play was a great success in London until the siege of London brought it to a close, and it seems only fitting and proper that the first important new drama of the theatrical year should come to us from the British Isles. If it were only for the opportunity that it offers Miss Barrymore, "The Corn Is Green" would be welcome. But in its own right it is to be greeted as a fine and forthright piece of theatrical writing.

* * *

Mr. Williams, the author, is himself a Welshman by birth, and the play has, at least to a certain extent, followed the early days of his own career. It is, however, not merely this knowledge that gives "The Corn Is Green" a moving autobiographical quality. As it is played here, the central character of the story is the lovely and comprehending woman who comes to the Welsh village in the final years of the last century and finds such great incipient talent in the dirty, resentful boy from the near-by coal mines. And the most touching thing about a genuinely touching drama is the manner in which the author seems to be looking back at a great and good woman who had been his benefactor, regarding her with the affection and comprehension that she must have deserved and paying a beautiful and heartfelt tribute to her. Here is merely the story of how this teacher recognized the quality of the boy and brought out the best that was in him, and somehow it becomes a tale of great point, meaning and quiet dramatic power.

* * *

Although it is essentially the narrative of the relationship between the middle-aged teacher and the boy, "The Corn Is Green" is filled with characters that always seem human beings, rather than figures in a play. The serious-minded Welsh Baptist and the shy, pretty spinster who are the teacher's loyal assistants the reformed shoplifter and her sluttish daughter; the hide-bound, foolish, easily-led Tory, who is brought by flattery to become a supporter of the school; the most ancient of the pupils—here are people who invariably seem to live and breathe and to possess that unusual quality of having an actual life outside of the play. As for the relationship between the boy and the teacher, it is contemplated with such insight and wisdom that it never descends to any suggestion of the romantic or the scandalous but is always the true and compelling account of a noble and great-souled woman, without pose or heroics, and of the way she discovered and nurtured a young man capable, you feel sure, of becoming a leader of his people. It is one of the great beauties of the play that it always makes you feel that it is treating of people who are of value to the world.

* * *

To the splendid role of the teacher Miss Barrymore brings all of that radiance of hers, all of her sly, twinkling humor, her rich and warm humanity and her superb understanding of character. It is a rarely beautiful performance, a characterization of greatness and true nobility. In the part of the boy, the part that Mr. Williams created in London, Richard Waring acts with sensitiveness and insight, next to Miss Barrymore's work, however, I think that the finest performance in the cast is that of Miss Thelma Schnee, who plays the disreputable girl of the story with remarkable deftness and skill. There are splendid portrayals, too, by Rhys Williams as the earnest-minded Baptist, by Miss Mildred Dunnock as the assistant teacher, by Edmond Breon as the Tory squire, by Miss Rosalind Ivan as the reformed thief, and by Sayre Crawley as the ancient pupil. The setting by Howard Bay is excellently atmospheric and Herman Shumlin's direction is characteristically thoughtful and understanding. "The Corn Is Green" is a warm, compassionate play, filled with the richness of humanity.

"The Corn Is Green"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *November 27, 1940*

Miss Barrymore Splendid in The Corn Is Green

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

ETHEL BARRYMORE has come to the rescue of Broadway in a comedy of Welsh country life that is so charming and so well acted that it makes one forget, if not forgive, all the futile and tawdry little plays that have preceded it during this sorry season.

The Corn Is Green is not of world-shaking significance. But it has a definite beauty, a kindly atmosphere and an attitude toward the human race that is refreshing and hopeful. It is, in short, a relief from the dispiriting experiences of the last eight weeks.

Although this play, by Emlyn Williams, deals with conditions in a Welsh mining town of some 40 years ago, it points unmistakably to problems that are common to all times and all countries. And if it seems to say that the cure for our social and economic evils is simply education and more education, who can quarrel with such obvious reasoning? The point is that The Corn is Green presents this thesis so delightfully and logically and realistically that the lesson—a primer lesson, if you will—is not only convincing but pleasant to absorb.

* * *

Miss Barrymore, who puts on and takes off decades as easily as changing a gown, now becomes a middle-aged spinster who has taken upon herself the almost impossible task of bringing the light of education to a community wallowing in ignorance. In the three years through which the action of the play progresses, she is called upon to battle a pompous and thick-witted squire, a suspicious and unwilling citizenry, and certain treachery within her own household. In the end she succeeds in raising out of the muck of the mines a young man who, it is promised, may some day become a great, liberal statesman and perhaps the savior of England.

The fact that the scene of this conflict is laid in Wales was sufficient to turn my thoughts, at various intervals, to Lloyd George, who also came from humble beginnings in that region—and to wonder whether Miss Barrymore's protege in the story will one day forsake his liberalism and demand the hanging of some future Kaiser. But let that pass, for the thought is too pessimistic to inject in such a hopeful situation as Mr. Williams' play leaves us all.

Little more can be said of Miss Barrymore's playing of this fine character, Miss Moffatt, than has already been said of her a hundred times over. It is not, despite the nobility of purpose behind it, a particularly warm character. That is, there is no visible personal affection behind her experiment with the young coal miner whom she raises above ground and sends to Oxford. It is, until the very last, a clinical experiment, motivated by an academic, though generous, desire to "do something" for mankind. Miss Barrymore's interest is detached and impersonal. She is a severe task-mistress, a dictator, a dominant female. And that is the way she enacts the role. I think she has captured the very essence of the woman and to do so she had to stifle some of the more endearing Barrymore mannerisms without quite extinguishing her always sparkling sense of humor. In other words, a splendid performance because it is so true to character.

* * *

The acting throughout is, in fact, a constant delight, and Herman Shumlin is to be complimented not only upon the casting but on his direction. Thelma Schnee, whose progress I have noted from time to time in the summer theaters, is now entitled to full recognition as one of the most versatile and adept of our younger actresses, and her portrayal of the scheming little trollop who nearly wrecks the Great Lady's plans is easily one of the outstanding characterizations of the year.

Edmon Breon gave a remarkably attractive performance of the blasted squire, and Rosalind Ivan's conception of a reformed pickpocket and proud mother of the youthful seductress was richly comic. Rhys Williams falls naturally into the part of the stuffy Welsh schoolmaster, and played with his usual sure skill.

Finally, after some three years in which I have constantly advised young Richard Waring that his playing was too stylized and melodramatic to suit my taste, my hat is off to him for a performance that was vivid, compelling and as real as life itself. I do not see how, in the character of the subject of Miss Barrymore's experiment, his acting could be bettered, and I am glad to praise him.

By all means go and see The Corn is Green.

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *November 27, 1940*

"The Corn Is Green" Brings Joy to E. Barrymore and Others

"The Corn Is Green," drama by Emlyn Williams. Produced by Herman Shumlin at the National Theatre, New York, Nov. 26, 1940.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

THE news from the National Theatre this morning is rather on the jubilant side. Emlyn Williams' "The Corn Is Green," which brought Ethel Barrymore back to town last night, is the best new play of a backward season.

So happy was the audience over both the good luck of a favorite first lady and the discovery of a good drama, that it remained after the play, a statistical scout has just phoned, to ring up fourteen curtain calls, eight of them in honor of Miss Barrymore solo.

Which is certainly cheering. And yet all that Mr. Williams has sent us is a simple story of honest folk confronted by honest problems. A serving of wholesome Welsh home-made bread can prove pretty satisfying when you are good and hungry.

Human Story

In "The Corn Is Green" Miss Barrymore is playing an English spinster, an intellectual with a university degree and an alert intelligence that she is tired of wasting. Inheriting a small house in a coal mining center of Wales, she goes there to live and finally to open a school for the children of the miners, a majority of whom can neither read nor write.

Among her pupils, and the one inspiration that helps her overcome all the hurdles, including a complacent squire who doesn't believe in educating the poor and lowly, is a lad of 15 with some thirst for knowledge. This boy she carries through to an Oxford scholarship, though the carrying includes the buying off of the kitchen maid he has seduced and the adoption of the baby that is the unhappy outcome of that meeting.

This is not a particularly stirring adventure, nor one deeply moving emotionally. And yet it is so honestly human in its writing and so satisfying in its playing that there is just cause for last night's enthusiasm.

It gives Miss Barrymore the best part she has had for several seasons. It presents her as frankly, though, in appearance, unbelievably middle aged, and provides a few of those tense scenes that she plays so effectively through tears.

Good Support

It is one of those Barrymore parts in which there are glints of humor and one in which she can toss her blonde head defiantly and read her lessons to the opposition with fire and finality.

It provides her, too, with an exceptionally well selected cast of helpers, including that fine young juvenile, Richard Waring, who last season won praise but only a few weeks work playing the unhappy John Wilkes Booth in "The Man Who Killed Lincoln."

He is a sturdy young Welshman, a defiant rebel on occasion, an inarticulate but grateful genius and a likable problem child consistently rolled into one characterization.

Edmond Breon has come over from England to play the Squire. He does so with modest but honest realism. Rosalind Ivan gives character and humor to an amusing housekeeper. Thelma Schnee plays the wayward maid with artful enthusiasm. Rhys Williams, being Welsh, helped Herman Shumlin with the direction.

He also plays a stolid helper with character touches, and Mildred Dunnock helpfully adds a skittish spinster to the group.

"The Corn Is Green" should carry Miss Barrymore well into the Spring. It gives a happy lift to Broadway's scanty list of worthwhile plays.

"Horse Fever"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, *November 25, 1940*

Ezra Stone Appears in Alex Yokel's Production of 'Horse Fever,' Written by Three Men on a Play

By BROOKS ATKINSON

IF THERE had been no "Three Men on a Horse" in 1935 there would have been no "Horse Fever" at the Mansfield on Saturday evening. For Alex Yokel, who struck it rich five years ago, is still betting on the ponies and has now produced another horse opera. There are three men on this play, Eugene Conrad, Zac and Ruby Gabel, who are down in the program as authors, and Ezra Stone, the chief victim of "What a Life," appears in the leading part as a misunderstood genius of the racing stables. The result is as fantastic as some of the betting combinations that threw their brains at the dope sheets every day within walking distance of the desk. But the result is funnier in isolated details than as a whole.

* * *

Why should this be? Take the main facts of the story, for instance. They have to do with a fertile-minded chap who attempts to psycho-analyze a race-horse out of a neurosis against starting at the post. As a fugitive from a feed bill, he hides his nag in the bathroom of a hotel suite, where the second act occurs. On the face of it, those are funny ideas, and they are amusingly presented by Mr. Stone, whose wrinkled brow and general air of worry and helplessness are good foils for laughter, and also by Lou Lubin, a short, skinny tough with a loosely hinged jaw who stammers ineffectually on the outside of the uproar.

Even a rough-and-tumble antic probably needs logic in its narrative and cumulative hysteria as it progresses. Both "Room Service" and "Three Men on a Horse" were completely plausible, once the main facts had been conceded, and they were funnier scene by scene. But the three authors of "Horse Fever" are gag comedians. They begin in the first scene with a whole series of practicable gags, like a stool that automatically plunges out of the wall beside the telephone stand when the receiver is picked up; or a desk drawer that automatically opens when the electric light cord is pulled.

* * *

Although these are ridiculously entertaining, they have very little to do with the main narrative of the comedy, and much of the dialogue is open to the same criticism. The retorts are funny in themselves, but they do not speed the story along. When the curtain finally comes down you have an impression of having laughed frequently during the evening, as you laugh at a briskly written radio skit, but you have nothing much to laugh over in remembrance. You have never had a chance to laugh uproariously over the inner incongruity of the narrative. Trying desperately to entertain you, the authors give an impression of racing like mad on a treadmill.

Under Milton Stiefel's direction the performance is all in one key of vertigo—as frenzied in the first scene as in the last, if not a little more so. Millard Mitchell, Judy Parrish, Sara Seegar, Joseph Pevney and the others are in there punching until the last minute. Of making many gags there is no end, and much wise-cracking is a weariness of the flesh.

For the benefit of the keen betting combinations on the third floor of this newspaper, here is one of the author's rules for picking a winner: "Take the weight of all the jockeys in the race, combine that figure with the number of horses running in the race and play the horse whose numbers are at the beginning and finish of the entire number." The sport of kings and suckers!

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, *November 25, 1940*

Ezra Stone Appears In "Horse Fever"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

FIVE years ago Alex Yokel was turning us all into devotees of the turf by his uproarious production of so uproarious a script as "Three Men on a Horse."

Now at the Mansfield he has opened the stable door again hoping to release another farce. This time his equine opera is something known as "Horse Fever," and the three playwrights who have worked on it are Eugene Conrad and Gabels, Zac and Ruby.

If the track proves muddy, if the play balks at the barrier and the resulting fun can hardly be described as the sport of kings, Mr. Yokel's entry does at least indulge in some promising spurts. Like many another idea, the idea upon which "Horse Fever" is based is full of laughing promises. At bottom the formula is much the same as the one John Cecil Holm and George Abbott put to hilarious use.

The timid little "greeting card" poet who got mixed up with the races in "Three Men on a Horse" is now an eccentric young inventor who turns from creating household gadgets to employ psychiatry as a means of curing a filly of a sad fixation from which she suffers.

Add to the young inventor's madness, the financial problems of a mad family; imagine the complications that might arise if the race-horse being psyched were stalled in a hotel bathroom without the management's knowing she is there; throw in one scene at the track—and my fear is that the comic expectations raised by such a mixture of "In Old Kentucky" and "Hellzapoppin" with Cornell's experiments in animal neuroses are apt greatly to succeed the amusement offered by "Horse Fever." Although some of it is funny in a very mild way, much of it is only silly, more of it is effortful, and all of it seems as playwriting to be distressingly untidy.

Ezra Stone, who has broadened with the years until he now looks more like a manager than a juvenile, gives—and has—his fun as the eccentric young inventor. Millard Mitchell is on hand to speak with that dryness only he commands such wisecracks as fall his way. Lou Lubin contributes most to the evening's gaiety by the breathless flow of his speech as an inarticulate follower of the ponies. And Trilby, a black beauty of rare charm, who has appeared in opera, vaudeville, and the movies, shows true horse sense while going through her paces.

The trouble (and a serious one it proves to be) is a lack of precision in the acting no less than in the writing. What the evening stands in want of desperately is surety, more surety, and still more surety. Its promises of fun are bogged down by a fatal amateurishness. The result is a farce more feeble than amusing. Although it is loud enough to satisfy hecklers, it could—and needs to—be far, far funnier than it is for everyone's comfort.

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, *November 25, 1940*

'Horse Fever,' a Frantic Farce, Opens at the Mansfield Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

PROBABLY Alex Yokel feels, or at any rate felt up to a few weeks ago, that any farce is bound to turn out all right if it has horses in it. General experience may not lead to this conclusion, but Mr. Yokel's experience is special. It was he, you know, who put on "Three Men on a Horse" a while back, and made the whole town whinny with glee. An experience like that is almost certain to leave its mark.

So Mr. Yokel, after waiting patiently, found another farce with the proper equine flavor and immediately put it on. He put in on at the Mansfield Saturday evening and it is called "Horse Fever" and was written by Eugene Conrad and Zac and Ruby Gabel. It is now evident that Mr. Yokel generalized on too little evidence. Farces with horses in them may be dreary and exhausting, just as may farces with dogs or cats or people from Hollywood. Horses alone are not enough.

"Horse Fever" deals, in a frantic fashion, with an inventive young man who, after filling the home of his uncle with frightening gadgets, took over the training of a race horse. The horse, a handsome and intelligent black mare named Trilby, had a complex. She wouldn't break. The young man, who is named Orville, worked on her subconscious and kept her locked up in a hotel bedroom until it was time for her to run. Then she ran, as reported from the stage through a loud speaker by a man with a bad cough.

This is a small, if mad, plot. Realizing as much, the authors piled on complications in desperate haste and each complication was madder—and sillier—than the one which went before. They also scrambled frantically after jokes and came up with some pretty bad ones, including one or two which seemed unsuitable in the presence of a two-year-old filly. Many in the first night audience laughed at these jokes, while the rest of us merely got tired. I am sorry to report that in the presence of all the running about, the furious gagging and the noisy complexity of "Horse Fever," I was among the fatigued.

Ezra Stone plays Orville and it is hard to think of anything he could have done that he didn't do, except possibly rewrite the play. Millard Mitchell was as lanky, detached and amusing as he always is and the others hurried about properly. Trilby (herself) was docile and long suffering—a very model for theatergoers.

"Horse Fever"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *November 25, 1940*

'Horse Fever' Gets Better Break Than Does the Audience

"Horse Fever," farce by Eugene Conrad, Zac and Ruby Gabel. Produced by Alex Yokel at the Mansfield Theatre, New York, Nov. 23, 1940.

★

By BURNS MANTLE

IF YOU believe a moronic youth could smuggle a racehorse into a hotel in a piano box, stable it in the bathroom and treat it psychiatrically for a tendency to balk at the post, you can believe in "Horse Fever." And I wish you joy of the experience.

This farce was produced by Alex Yokel at the Mansfield theatre Saturday night. Three persons worked on the script, Eugene Conrad and Zac and Ruby Gabel.

There are twenty actors in the cast, including Ezra Stone, who is featured, and Millard Mitchell, who isn't very lucky either. It probably cost six or seven thousand dollars to stage. So somebody must have believed in it.

As for me, I think "Horse Fever" is preposterous, without being preposterously silly. I think it is the type of farce that does the theatre harm in that it discourages playgoers and playgoing in general.

I can't see how it interested Mr. Yokel, who is at least experienced in the theatre and has had contact with that master of farce, George Abbott, who staged the highly successful "Three Men on a Horse" for him.

I can't see how it interested Ezra Stone, who is also Abbott trained, and experienced beyond his years as chief comedian of "What a Life," "Brother Rat" and the lesser "See My Lawyer."

I can't understand how Milton Stiefel could have been interested enough to want to stage it, seeing that for eleven years as the promoter of a Summer theater at Ivoryton, Conn., he has been reviving good plays and meeting intelligent theatre people.

There may be a reason. There may be several reasons. But I cannot think of one of them.

P. S.—The horse overcame the balk but lost the race.

'HORSE FEVER'

A farce in three acts by Eugene Conrad, Zac and Ruby Gabel; staged by Milton Stiefel; settings by Louis Kennel; presented at the Mansfield Theater on November 23, 1940, by Alex Yokel. The cast:

Mrs. Drum	Zamah Cunningham
Virgo	Marietta Canty
Frank Drum	Joseph Pevney
Milly Flynn	Sara Seegar
Joe Flynn	Millard Mitchell
Janet Deering	Judy Parrish
Horatio Drum	Arthur Allen
Orville	Ezra Stone
Murphy	Clancy Cooper
Mr. Hilton	Neil Moore
Labor Day Green	Bobby Mitchell
Trilby	Herself
Maid	Kay Loring
Lucky Sam	Lou Lubin
Dr. Terganoff	Daniel Ocko
Hotel Manager	Sheldon Bennett
City Marshall	John L. Kearney
Photographer	Jack Arnold
A Race Track Steward	Peter Cusanelli
Jocky Lane	Leslie Barrett
Messenger Boy	Mitchell Kowal

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *November 25, 1940*

Horse Fever Is Farce About the Racetrack

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

ALEX YOKEL, who once made a theatrical killing with his Three Men on a Horse, has plunged once too often on the ponies, it seems to me. His new production, Horse Fever, which opened at the Mansfield Theater Saturday night, trails the field of childish comedies which have already made this a peculiarly silly season.

The authors, Eugene Conrad, Zac and Ruby Gabel, labored hard to make their play conform to the pattern of the earlier success. They based their comedy on the mildly amusing idea that a young man might beat the races by applying psychology directly to the horses, and on this flimsy basis they went on to rear a structure of unbelievable nonsense.

It would be a waste of your time and mine to accord Horse Fever any lengthy description but the brand of humor it contains can be quickly established by the fact that the name of the winning horse is My Fanny. The authors, indeed enjoy the implications in the name so hugely that they repeat it with relish at every opportunity.

* * *

The principal figure in Horse Fever is a scatterbrained young inventor whose devices are a constant source of irritation, annoyance and even danger to his family. It is he who persuades the strangely dim-witted family to permit him to train their race horse—a legacy—by applied psychology rather than by customary methods.

With such an obvious character it is equally obvious that Ezra Stone would be called in to play it, and right now is as good as any time to say that Mr. Stone, like Mr. Yokel, is going to the horse trough once too often. Or does he, perhaps, intend to play the Henry Aldrich all the rest of his life, God forbid! The cute fat boy role is beginning to wear thin.

Mr. Yokel has given Horse Fever an otherwise agreeable cast, although some of them, like Mr. Stone, are in danger of settling into "types" from which they will eventually find difficulty in escaping. Millard Mitchell, for example, is seen again as an amiable ne'er-do-well, and he certainly makes the most of the slender opportunities in the part. But the program notes call him "a standard American character actor," which is unfortunately beginning to be a truthful description though a dubious compliment.

* * *

Zamah Cunningham does as well as possible in another mother role. Lou Lubin mugs amusingly through a tout's part. Judy Parrish is a pretty little girl who acts becomingly. Trilby, the black horse, is one of the best actors on the stage.

I am reluctant to place all the blame for the dull result on the shoulders of Milton Stiefel, who directed it, but a speedier performance might have concealed some of the play's deficiencies.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, *November 25, 1940*

Three Authors on a Horse

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

THE theory that it is difficult for new authors to have a play produced on Broadway was effectively refuted at the Mansfield Theater Saturday night. Three newcomers named Eugene Conrad and Zac and Ruby Gabel wrote a farce called "Horse Fever" and Alex Yokel, who is an experienced producer, put it on a Manhattan stage with real actors, and, if "Horse Fever" can achieve a Broadwy production, anything can. I should think that the chief result of this dismal presentation would be to encourage all the inept incipient playwrights and discourage all the promising ones.

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Apparently Mr. Yokel, who should know better, was attracted to the script of "Horse Fever" because its subject matter reminded him of a previous show of his called "Three Men on a Horse." The new work could, in fact, be described as a frantic attempt to combine the narratives of "Three Men on a Horse" and "Room Service" with something or other about psychiatry thrown in for bad measure. A young man who invents gadgets decides to cure a neurotic racehorse of its complexes and hides the horse in his hotel room, and things get duller and duller as the plot darts about with an inexhaustible lack of ingenuity or humor.

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Some experienced actors have been persuaded to participate in the clumsy and violent antics of the play. Ezra Stone, who is perhaps losing his boyishness more rapidly than he realizes, strives energetically as the inventive young man who presumably is the hero of "Horse Fever" and that agreeable comic, Millard Mitchell, does everything possible as the hero's faithful follower. Lou Lubin manages to make something of a character, although not an inexpressibly comic one, of a stuttering racing man, and young Miss Judy Parrish is a pleasant ingenue. In truth all of the players strive ardently, but "Horse Fever" remains as dull as a comedy about Hollywood.